Children’s and young adult librarians are crucial links to effective learning for students. This straightforward handbook is filled with nuts-and-bolts advice on the best ways to help young people with their homework, no matter what the assignment. Carol F. Intner, a certified English teacher and experienced tutor, concentrates on the practical, covering:

- How students’ different learning styles and current technology inform the homework process
- Staff training and community outreach
- Options for working more closely with both students and teachers

From planning a customized homework-help agenda to demonstrating how to help students successfully use their technological savvy in ways not necessarily possible at home, this book presents a no-nonsense, comprehensive approach to giving students the assistance they need.
Homework Help from the Library

In Person and Online

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2:40 p.m. A gaggle of high school students bursts from the building a few blocks away and spreads like an amoeba. The teenagers are energized with hormones and freedom from school rules. *No talking, sit down, line up, hands to yourself, respectful language please, take out your books, put away your cell phones.* No teachers or administrators keep watchful eyes over them once school lets out. They fight. They flirt. They egg each other on. They seem oblivious to the adults stepping aside to avoid their groups of two and three who talk and laugh too loudly.

2:55 p.m. In the elementary school yard, eighteen classes of children stand in neat double lines. Girls on one side, boys on the other. Now they are quiet because they know their classes will not be dismissed if they poke each other or tell a joke or whisper someone else's secret. But in just a few minutes, each of the K–5 classes will disperse and run to grasp the hands of waiting parents or babysitters, to climb the steps onto the school bus, or to walk the few blocks home. When all eighteen classes have been dismissed, the sound most resembles a cheering stadium full of avid football fans just as the quarterback completes the game-winning touchdown pass.
6:00 p.m. Charter school students, fifth through eighth graders, pour from the stairwell onto the street. Some walk to the train; others get rides. The official school day ends at 4 p.m., but all students are required to participate in afterschool activities four days a week. For some this means tutoring; others join the dance team or chess club. They might have emerged from the building like students elsewhere—a tumble of laughter, games, and teasing—except for one thing: they have been in the same building since 7:30 a.m. and they are exhausted.

7:30 p.m. The basketball game has ended and the visiting team won. Coach tells the players where they made their mistakes and what they need to do to improve. His screaming, loud enough to make them cringe, is interspersed with gentle encouragement. However he modulates his voice, the girls stare at the floor.

What do the hormone-laden high school student, the wide-eyed elementary school student, the exhausted middle school student, and the demoralized athlete have in common? They all have homework assignments. And they’re coming to your library, either in person or via the Internet. This guide will help you prepare for them.
Introduction

In 2001, Cindy Mediavilla published the seminal *Creating the Full-Service Homework Center in Your Library*. Advocating the development of formal homework programs, Mediavilla pointed out the potential for homework programs to solve a range of problems associated with unattended children after school, from the children’s vulnerability to dangerous influences to the mayhem that accompanies the large numbers of school-age patrons who converge on libraries. Her book remains the quintessential guide to the practicalities of setting up a formal homework help center to provide one-on-one homework assistance to student patrons.

Ten years later, students continue to turn to the library for help with homework, and the plethora of choices for how to provide that assistance is expanding rapidly as the types of communication and information delivery vehicles increase: web pages, databases, the Internet, Facebook, Twitter, IM-ing. Formal homework programs continue to operate successfully, but they cannot possibly satisfy all the homework-related information and educational needs of young patrons—and this is an especially critical time for librarians to meet those needs. Today we have the vast majority of an entire generation raised with access to huge amounts of information at their fingertips without ever leaving their homes. If libraries have young people within their walls or on their
websites today, and the interest of those young people is primarily homework help, then staff must use this opportunity to get kids hooked on libraries so they become the adult patrons of tomorrow. Show them what libraries have to offer that home-based Internet cannot, and illustrate for them how they can benefit from their libraries wherever they may be—at the library, at home, at school, or at Starbucks.

If we accept for the moment the “conventional wisdom . . . that most children making use of [the] public library . . . are there for homework purposes” (Walter 2001, 31), we must still ask how providing homework help relates to the mission of the library outside the need to secure future patronage. To some extent the answer to this question differs depending on whether the library in question is a school media center or a public library, although in both cases providing homework supports the library’s mission.

School libraries are intertwined with the educational system so that the librarian’s expertise is utilized specifically to meet educational goals. School librarian and columnist Joyce Kasman Valenza appeals to teachers to take advantage of this expertise and assures them that “[school] librarians get their kicks from making you [the teacher] look good. Not only do they help learners learn, they help teachers teach” (Valenza 2007). One of the school librarian’s primary roles is to support the teaching process as part of a cohesive staff with shared goals and priorities. School librarians teach students how to access information and support the implementation of school curricula. Students may be required to spend a certain amount of time each week in the library, and teachers may bring classes there to begin working on long-term homework projects or to conduct research related to specific assignments. In many school libraries, students continue this process on their own after school or during lunch. Helping students with homework in this manner is an integral aspect of the school librarian’s role. However, if school administrators perceive a need for formal homework or out-of-classroom assistance, the resulting programs will probably fall under the auspices of classroom teachers, not the school librarian.

In contrast, usually the general or youth librarian in the public library operates entirely outside the context of the school structure and all that implies.1

The public library’s constituency is the community at large, and the stated purpose of the library varies from facility to facility. Rather than adopt a professionwide mission for libraries, the Public Library Association (PLA) publishes Planning for Results, which includes a list of “service responses” from which library planners can pick and choose depending on needs in their communities. “Formal learning support,” the response applicable to homework assistance, refers to helping students with formal education, whether those
students are educated at home or enrolled at a public or private school or university. Although this may be one of many service options, both librarians and patrons believe it to be an important component of the public library’s mission, a view shared by teachers, parents, and community leaders. However, the underpinning of the library’s role in educating students is quite different from the foundation of classroom education. The librarian participates in education to respond to the needs and wishes of the library patron, not to improve test scores or because a school administrator insists on it to reach assessment objectives. The general or youth librarian has the opportunity to instruct patrons with every interaction—all of which are voluntary on the part of the student—but it is not the main thrust of those interactions. These librarians do not give assignments, and the intent behind their questions is to determine how the patron can best find the desired information, not to check how well the student recalls a recently taught concept.

Thus, the public librarians’ role differs from that of their school counterparts in the planning, implementation, and oversight of homework assistance, but not in the mandate to provide it. Students want assistance with their homework, and helping kids with homework is part of the mission of children’s and youth services in all libraries serving the needs of school-age children. The question that remains, and the focus of this book, is how to do it effectively.

Any cogent homework assistance program or set of programs should be based on current advances in information services and progress in the field of education. Just as research in information services has helped librarians learn to retrieve and deliver information effectively and provide a range of services in library buildings, pedagogy utilizes research to determine how children learn and how best to help them do so. Therefore, instead of forcing librarians to reinvent the wheel when they interact with students, especially when they are providing homework help, knowledge of productive pedagogical methods can inform successful homework help in libraries.

In effect, homework help should be the confluence of the education and information service fields. I address this concept in the first chapter of the book. A discussion about the history of youth services and patterns of library usage is followed by an examination of recent developments in education and a comparative analysis of education and library service methods involving children. In chapter 2, I outline the menu of services from which the librarian can choose to develop a homework assistance program and considerations for selecting from that menu. Mediavilla explored one option in her book: one-on-one tutoring centers. Librarians can, however, employ many other techniques depending on the parameters of a library’s homework help program. The topic of chapter 3 is staff input and training, which are critical to
the success of any program you implement in the library. Changes in technology affecting communication and information services are so numerous and occur so rapidly that I devote two chapters to them: chapter 4, to explore using in-house technology in homework help programs, and chapter 5, in which the discussion centers on patrons using technology from remote locations. Chapter 6 addresses using pedagogical techniques to answer homework reference queries effectively, and I cover troubleshooting in chapter 7. Once you have established a productive set of homework help services, if you cannot convince school children to use them, it does not matter how good they are, and if they are not meeting the needs of your patrons, you have to go back to the drawing board. Therefore, the final two chapters cover two important administrative functions: marketing and evaluation.

Note
1. Dozens of libraries across the United States are housed in school buildings to further the cooperative relationship between the school and the library, and in at least one case, the city of Nashville, the mayor wants the public library system to operate all school media centers as well (Goldberg 2009).
EVERY BUILDING REQUIRES a foundation, and this chapter is the foun-
dation for this book. Information services and education have parallel
histories driven by similar—sometimes even the same—events and often the
same cultural problems and priorities. Yet the research and training for each
of these fields are conducted in entirely separate domains, with only a bit of
overlap. Neither field seems to suffer tremendously from the division. Where
homework help in libraries is concerned, however, education and information
services fully entwine—sometimes creating knots in the process. Homework
assignments are designed by teachers to support the learning process and meet
school objectives. Teachers are trained in pedagogical techniques that help
them create assignments and work with students, but still students are often
overwhelmed by their homework. They, in turn, come to libraries or their web-
sites for information and assistance, but the library staff, expert in information
services, may be less familiar with pedagogical strategies that can inform and
improve the services they provide to students. The purpose of this book is to
review the range of services from which librarians can choose to plan their
homework help programs and outline pedagogical techniques that can facilitate
the process and enhance face-to-face—or computer-to-computer—encounters
between librarians and their young patrons. The purpose of this chapter is to
Background

outline the background and context for the practical approaches explored in the remainder of the text.

The discussion begins with a brief review of youth services, specifically as it relates to helping students with homework. How much do kids actually use the library, though? Does their usage pattern warrant this exploration of how to help them with homework? These questions are answered in an examination of the available information on youth usage of libraries. A brief history of pedagogical trends and advances follows, with an emphasis on learning style theory because it has powerful practical implications for providing homework help. The chapter closes with a short perusal of common ground: the shared priorities and formal cooperative programs between libraries and schools, and formal homework programs in library buildings.

GENERAL HISTORY OF YOUTH SERVICES

Mention “youth services” and “libraries” to anyone uninvolved in the information services world, and the listener, searching for a personal way to connect to the topic, will respond with a tale about bringing a toddler to the local library’s story hour, or how his ninth-grade daughter feels about the required, graded session in the school media center, or the value of summer reading programs, or a teenager’s wonder that her local library hosts game nights. “Youth services,” though it sounds like a cohesive set of programs, is characterized by a wide range of functions for a diverse clientele. As Christine Jenkins (2000, 103) writes in her survey of research on youth services librarianship, “youth service librarianship—a term that encompasses all library services to youth (children and young adults, ages zero to eighteen) in school and public library settings—has long been considered the classic success story of American libraries.” Despite the dearth of research on long stretches of youth services’ history that Jenkins and other experts lament, certain events of significance and trends in serving young patrons emerge in the historical record.

Gaining Entrance: The Earliest Years of Youth Services

Today it is hard to imagine a library without young patrons, but the first libraries in the United States, the Harvard College library established in 1638 and Ben Franklin’s Philadelphia Library Company founded in 1732, did not welcome kids. By the nineteenth century, however, the idea that children should have access to libraries—at least to some libraries—took shape. In 1803, author, publisher, and bookseller Caleb Bingham donated 150 books for a children’s
library in his hometown of Salisbury, Connecticut, and “apprentice libraries” for working young men were established in Philadelphia and Brooklyn in 1820 and 1823, respectively. The goal of these libraries was to help the patrons further their education, and, for the most part, library usage was limited to young men (the Brooklyn library did permit girls to use the library one afternoon a week). A few years later, the towns of Peterborough, New Hampshire, and West Cambridge, Massachusetts, opened children’s libraries. At the same time, various churches developed libraries for Sunday school students. To attract poor children to participate, not only were the books lent out for free, but eventually secular material was included, too.

Misgivings about allowing children into libraries continued through most of the 1800s even as services to youth were expanding. A pivotal event cited in many histories of children’s services is the 1835 New York State legislation to fund libraries within each school district. But these libraries were intended for the use of adults, not the children who attended school (Sayers 1963). In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the ambivalence to allowing children in libraries changed, and in short order children’s services were among the most important provided. In 1876, when it was common for libraries to be closed to children below high school age, the U.S. Bureau of Education produced the report “Public Libraries in the United States of America,” in which William Fletcher made the argument that age restrictions should be eliminated and special facilities for children provided in libraries throughout the country. At the very first ALA conference, Samuel S. Green gave a presentation that included a discussion of assisting young patrons, and three years later the conference theme was children’s literature. Public discourse began on the nature and quality of literature available to children. However, as Sayers (1963, 8) points out, “not until twenty years later did the persistent knocking of children upon the doors of libraries succeed.” In the last decade of the nineteenth century, circulating library rooms for children began to open throughout the country. Services to children expanded to include story hours, games, and reading clubs, and at the turn of the century, training programs for children’s librarianship opened at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn and the Carnegie Pittsburgh Training School.

The Modern Library Movement: The First Half of the Twentieth Century

From the very inception of the “modern library movement” with the creation of ALA, the necessity for a cooperative relationship between libraries and schools was recognized. ALA appointed a committee to work with teachers’
National Education Association to improve public education, and school
libraries, as they are currently configured, developed out of early public library
service to schools of the late 1890s and early 1900s (Jenkins 2000, 107). In 1901,
Josephine Rathbone provided a history to date of the relationship between
schools and libraries, including the 1879 ALA conference that brought teachers
and librarians together to discuss mutual needs for the first time, and several
cooperative programs were implemented in the late 1870s (Rathbone 1901). At
that 1879 conference, R. C. Metcalf, headmaster of the Wells School in Boston,
openly expressed at least one obstacle to that process: antipathy among some
educators for the library: “It remains to suggest how, in my opinion, the public
library can be made a great public benefit, rather than what it frequently is, a
public nuisance. So long as our pupils are allowed free access to a public library
without direction as to choice, either by parent, teacher, or librarian, we can
look for no good results” (quoted in Rathbone 1901).

In the early years of youth services, the majority of the information on how
schools and libraries could work together focused on training students to use
the library and its collection selection, and helping teachers with materials to
support pedagogy rather than helping students with individual assignments.
The idea of the library as a source of homework help as we know it today had
not yet been hatched.

In the early twentieth century, youth services flourished. In the 1920s and
’30s, the number of separate reading rooms and services for students expanded.
In 1930, Effie Power wrote the first textbook for youth services librarians,
Library Service for Children, in which she covers everything ranging from the
history of youth services to which kind of furniture to use in the children’s area
and how to arrange it. She describes youth services as a junior varsity library
experience: librarians should teach students how to use the library so they
will be prepared to use adult libraries when they are older. She also highlights
high standards of collection selection (no dime store novels here), cooperative
relationships with schools, and helping students become knowledgeable. She
touches on homework help when she includes helping students find books to
read for assignments in her discussion of the youth services librarian’s activi-
ties (Power 1930).

The 1930s saw a commitment to provide services for young people
endorsed by library after library across the country, accompanied by an
increasing awareness of the separate needs of young adults. In 1941 the ALA
Division of Library Service to Children and Young People was formed, includ-
ing sections for both school and public libraries. Ten years later, the Divi-
sion split into several groups, one representing services for young adults
(Young Adult Services Division, now called the Young Adult Library Services
Association, YALSA), and one representing librarians providing services for children (Association of Library Services to Children, ALSC). Despite these increasing attempts at cooperation between libraries and schools, public and school librarians were often at odds with each other, competing for programming and funding, and this led to the creation of a third division, the American Association of School Librarians (AASL).

The Baby Boomers and Social Change

During the 1960s, the changing political scene in the United States was reflected within the information services community. Just as the civil rights movement was gaining momentum in the country at large, in 1960, a group of African American students refused to leave a segregated library in Danville, Virginia. Sensitivity to the needs of minorities and the economically disadvantaged led to the development of community outreach programs in libraries and the expansion of collections to be more responsive to diverse users. Some libraries received funding through President Lyndon Johnson’s War on Poverty, and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 provided funding to purchase library materials and textbooks. Though some of the programs that proliferated were abolished when federal funding dried up, some best practices developed during this era remain intact, such as outreach programs and cooperation with the local community.

Throughout the 1950s and ’60s, libraries were overwhelmed by huge numbers of young people in their buildings. Baby boomers began utilizing library services in greater numbers, for two reasons: there were simply more of them, and they went to libraries more often because they had more assignments. In response to the belief that education in the United States should be beefed up to make the country globally competitive, curricula—and the resulting homework—were intensified. Accommodating the large number of young people strained librarian’s budgets, time, space, and patience, and some felt it detracted from adult services (Willet 1995). Some libraries resorted to refusing to answer teenagers’ reference questions, eliminating or restricting borrowing and reading room privileges for young people, and requiring permission from either parents or teachers before allowing use of the library. School children got the message; in A Fair Garden and the Swarm of Beasts, young adult librarian Margaret A. Edwards noted that “one of the greatest barriers to full public library service was the poor attitude of public librarians towards students” (Mediavilla 2001, viii).

Exacerbating the situation, animosity between school and public librarians resurfaced when general librarians blamed school librarians for the young
crowds; if the school librarians were doing their job, so the logic went, the students would not have to use public library facilities. To this day, “many public librarians feel that curriculum-based library services are best left to the schools” (Mediavilla 2001, viii). Also, the effort required to handle large crowds of students remains a concern. In fact, as recently as 2007 one library, the Maplewood (New Jersey) Memorial Library, temporarily closed its doors altogether after school hours rather than let large numbers of middle school students cross the threshold (Kelley 2007).

Technology Takeover: The 1980s through the Present

Advances in technology affecting information services dramatically impacted all information services, including youth services, in the final quarter of the twentieth century. In the 1960s catalogs began going electronic in a few pioneering libraries with mainframes, and as early as 1971 ALA’s Young Adult Services Division presented a preconference event to discuss the impact of audiovisual materials on young adults. More and more catalogs began switching over to electronic format during the 1980s, when personal computers became available, and libraries began offering computer access. Through the 1980s and ’90s, reference services began to include access by telephone, then e-mail, and finally IM chatting formats manned either by librarians or by private contractors. By the early twenty-first century, most public libraries offered data subscription services to all users and had web pages on the Internet, many with links for remote access to library services. Most of these libraries had a web link to a page reserved for youth services, and sometimes they offered separate pages for children and for teens. In 1997 the federal government passed the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) to fund technology development and access to electronic communication for underserved populations.

Youth Services and Homework Help

As Willet (1995, 97) notes, “over the course of the last hundred years, the goals and techniques of youth services have maintained a remarkable consistency. Youth librarians have concentrated on supplementing formal education and promoting self development through leisure reading and activities.” Some form of homework assistance has always been part of this youth services legacy, and today homework assistance of one kind or another is a standard service to young people. In the early years, collection development was driven by local school curricula, and as youth services began to develop and expand,
many shared the viewpoint expressed by the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners and Bureau of Library Extension in a 1968 policy statement: “Neither the school nor the public library alone can provide the quality and the quantity of materials necessary to serve all the demands of the curriculum and the community” (Woolls 2003, 528). By the mid-1980s, some libraries in California had established formal homework assistance programs, and increasingly libraries across the country have implemented such programs. In the very beginnings of youth services, libraries supplemented formal education. Now libraries have become an integral part of the education process.

Patterns of Youth Usage of the Library

To what extent should libraries accommodate the preferences of young users? Theoretically and practically, it is important to meet the needs of school-age users now so that future patronage will be secure. This is especially critical in the age of the Internet. However, even beyond this nugget of common sense, the small amount of available statistics about library usage warrants taking note of and responding to young patrons. They are who is using the library; therefore we must determine how they use the library and help them do so.

In virtually all research on youth library usage, studies show that the vast majority of children and young adults use libraries and constitute the largest proportion of the library user population. In the 1981, a survey in Canada found that 90 percent of young adults surveyed used the library at least occasionally. A slightly later study in Calgary found that 82 percent of children in fourth through sixth grade used the library within the previous year, whereas only 50 percent of adults could make that claim. A 1989 survey in Rock County, Wisconsin, confirmed this pattern, if not the precise numbers: almost 68 percent of all youths had used the library in the previous year, including 86.5 percent of all twelve- to fourteen-year-olds. Of the latter group who used the library, a little over half reported using it more than ten times each year (statistics from Willet 1995).

The most recent statistics available are compelling. The U.S. Department of Education found that children and young adults constitute 60 percent of library users on any given day; 37 percent are children, and almost one library user in four is a young adult. Furthermore, the ethnic and racial makeup of children in libraries had changed; 40 percent of librarians reported that diversity increased over the five years preceding the survey (Collins and Chandler 1997). Examining library usage by polling children and young adults, an ALA-funded Harris poll revealed that 88 percent of students ages eight through eighteen visited either their school or public library in person or via the Internet at some
point in the previous year; nine in ten did so at least a few times a year, and about one in seven utilized library services “a couple of times a week” (Harris Interactive 2007). Young people of many backgrounds use both their school and public libraries frequently, and youth are the overwhelming majority of patrons in public libraries. But what do they do while they are there? Why do they go to libraries?

The top draw of the library, whether online or in buildings, is help with school assignments and access to technology. Although patrons do report that they come to the library to find books to read for pleasure or to pursue further information in areas of personal interest, numerous studies involving student patrons in various age groups show that students come to the library to work. They go to the library for materials to complete school assignments. They want access to computers, and they want training to use those computers effectively for schoolwork. Most youth services librarians know that students head right for the computers when they enter the building, but Harris Interactive found that only a quarter of them say they use library computers for entertainment; most of them use the technology for their schoolwork rather than for activities unrelated to school or studying. Often student contact with the library consists of going to the library website for help with research and information for school assignments. As library websites become increasingly elaborate portals for finding homework information, 50 percent of all teens report going online via a library website. The implication is that there is huge potential for the impact of libraries on remote research for homework assignments. Ninety-four percent of students ages 12 to 17 use the Internet for school research, and 78 percent believe the Internet helps them complete assignments effectively (Bilal 2007).

Another way of examining how students are using libraries is to listen to what they say they would like to see improved or expanded. Some requests made in various surveys are unrelated to the nature of library usage. For example, Noelle Egan, electronics research librarian at Drexel University, analyzed the literature on young adult responses and found that kids always requested food. Students also wanted more dedicated space in libraries, fewer restrictions, and friendlier librarians (Egan 2003). In the Harris poll, young patrons nine years old and up valued qualities that reflected a desire to feel more welcomed at the library. They wanted public libraries closer to their homes, longer hours, more activities, a “warm welcoming atmosphere,” and a space of their own (Harris Interactive 2007). When asked to consider the substance of the services offered, students’ answers supported the conclusion that they want homework help and access to technology in the library setting. For example, Elaine Meyers’s study of teen focus group responses revealed that students would like more
computers in libraries so wait time for access would decrease, and that students are frustrated by the lack of help they get from staff (Meyers 1999). Specifically, teens report they need more training to use technology effectively. They want assistance on long-term projects, and they want higher-quality materials to be available. Young patrons may visit libraries in person or via the Internet for leisure purposes, but research so far indicates that their main priority vis-à-vis the library is to receive help with assignments and access to computers, virtual resources, and software that can help them with school projects.

TWENTIETH-CENTURY DEVELOPMENTS IN EDUCATION

As in the world of haute couture, pedagogical hemlines rise and fall. When the hemlines are down, more traditional, teacher-centered approaches, emphasis on academic rigor, and strict “standards” prevail. Rising hemlines, or the more progressive approaches, tend to highlight the value of student-centered and student-initiated learning, flexibility in what constitutes a classroom, and flexibility in classroom instruction. The debate about which approach more effectively educates children, which began in the first half of the twentieth century, continues today. The effect of this debate on homework help in libraries is twofold: the current fashion can affect the amount and type of homework students receive and come to complete in the library; and when a new approach is “in,” techniques are developed that can be used to inform the process of providing homework help in libraries.

One of the most obvious differences between the classrooms of 1900 and those of today is the physical arrangement of the room, which, in effect, reflects the underlying differences in pedagogical philosophy:

In 1900, a teacher typically expected her students to enter and exit her classroom in unison and to spend most of their time sitting at desks bolted to the floor. Except for periods devoted to student recitation, teachers did most of the talking. . . . By the 1990s, desks were rarely attached in fixed positions and students did not march to classes. Relationships between students and teachers were decidedly more informal. (Sealander 2003, 216)

Each time the hemlines go up and down from progressive to traditional and back again, it seems that tidbits from the “old” ways stick and are folded into the new fashions.
The First Glimmers of the Student-Centered Classroom

The concept of student-centered learning first achieved popularity in the 1920s. It was a complete about-face from standard teaching methods to that point. Prior to this, the teacher talked most of the time, students worked primarily as a whole group, and desks pointed the same direction—toward the board or teacher. In the student-centered classroom of the early twentieth century, like the student-centered classroom of today, the teacher relinquished the classroom stage to students to a large degree, guiding and directing from the wings. Students determined what they learned and how they learned it. Learning took place in small groups, and classrooms were arranged to facilitate this. Materials were varied, permitting students to choose from those approaches to which they felt they best responded, and students spoke at least as much as the teacher. Progressive reformers of the early twentieth century criticized and tried to abolish drills and rote memorization, warning that these methods were detrimental to students’ health.

The Pendulum Swings Back and Forth

In the mid-1950s, the emphasis on standards and achievement had a brief resurgence after the nation reacted to two events: Rudolph Flesch published the now-famous Why Johnny Can’t Read, in which he blames teaching methods for an epidemic of illiteracy in the United States, and the Russians launched Sputnik. The impact of Sputnik on the American ego in general and education in particular cannot be underestimated. As Powell (2007) points out, “though Sputnik was a relatively simple satellite compared with the more complex machines to follow, its beeping signal from space galvanized the United States to enact reforms in science and engineering education so that the nation could regain technological ground it appeared to have lost to its Soviet rival.”

By the 1960s, however, the less structured approach of the early twentieth century had returned. Ramping up educational instruction was antithetical to the low-key, rebellion-filled 1960s. Instead, educational reformers began exploring alternative schools, open classrooms, and various student-friendly classroom strategies such as active learning, learning in a variety of media, and self-directed learning activities.

When educational researchers learned that SAT scores had declined along with attendance, enrollment in academic courses, and the number of homework assignments in the mid-1970s, the educational hemlines demurred to the more traditional approach yet again. Walls went back up between the classrooms, and over several decades the emphasis on standards, testing,
and accountability gradually escalated, culminating with the enactment and domination of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001. This legislation required every state to test every student, with few exceptions, to measure how effectively standards were met. Now educators are incorporating and modifying child-centered methods developed in the progressive eras into rigorous academic standards, measured quantitatively as required by No Child Left Behind and other education policies under consideration for the future. Some of the buzzwords and concepts may differ slightly, but today’s “cooperative learning” methods, emphasis on “critical thinking skills,” and treatment of learning as a process rather than an end are approaches quite similar to those that were popular in earlier decades of the twentieth century.

Many educators now recommend a combination of student-centered approaches, which focus on how the student learns, and the traditional concerns of enhancing academic achievement as measured by tests, which focus on what knowledge the student acquires.

**Learning Style Theory**

One of the major advances of the progressive eras that have been incorporated into most teacher training programs is learning style theory: recognition that students learn in different ways and that teachers must respond to individual learning styles if they are to engage their pupils effectively. Research points to lack of educational success, especially among the most at-risk populations, because teachers do not recognize or respond to students’ learning styles, not because the students are incapable of academic accomplishment. In contrast, students excel when the process of instruction, through varied activities, covers all learning styles, enabling them to respond to the methods that most effectively activate learning for each one of them.

One of the pioneers in examining the styles through which people learn was Carl Jung, who in the 1920s defined four ways of perceiving the world: sensing (following orderly procedures), feeling (emotional responses and spontaneity), intuition (perceiving ideas and information from abstractions), and thinking (rational thought). Most people tend to learn in combinations of these processes, Jung explained. For example, “intuitive-thinking” people are “theoretical, intellectual, and knowledge oriented,” whereas sensing-feelers are “sociable, friendly, and interpersonally oriented” (Silver et al. 2000, 25–26). Some teachers still utilize Jung’s framework when they plan lessons for their classes.

In the 1980s, Howard Gardner developed a different approach to learning style, one cited more frequently in education texts. He defined eight
“intelligences” and suggested that each person excels at one or more of them. People learn better, therefore, when information is presented in a manner that appeals to that intelligence. The intelligences are as follows:

- Verbal/linguistic—responds to language and words
- Logical/mathematical—responds to rational patterns and tends to excel in math and science
- Spatial—responds to visual presentations of material
- Musical—responds to music and components of music (e.g., rhythm)
- Body/kinesthetic—responds to touch and movement
- Interpersonal—responds to social interaction
- Intrapersonal—responds to inner feelings and ideas
- Naturalist—responds to flora, fauna, and other aspects of nature

Those who train and supervise teachers or write methodology texts encourage educators to include assignments that respond to multiple intelligences. For example, a teacher who wants students to analyze a character in a literary text might appeal to those with refined musical intelligence by offering an assignment to create a rap song to express the feelings of a character in a literary text, a spatial choice might be to draw the character in detail, and a kinesthetic assignment might be to act out a scene that illustrates the character’s qualities.

A more succinct learning style theory that has been widely applied was devised by special educator Grace Fernald in the 1940s: VAKT (visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and tactile learning styles). The method, which is still used with special-education students, is applied in almost every content area with learners of all grades and ability levels, including adults. The process began when Fernald used all three of the VAKT senses to teach spelling. She wrote the words down so students could see them (visual learning), had the students recite the words aloud so they could hear them (auditory learning), and then had student write the words by tracing over the letters (kinesthetic and tactile learning). Prescriptions for how best to engage different kinds of learners and types of appropriate activities for each of the VAKT senses have been extrapolated from Fernald’s work, and textbooks and web pages abound with related suggestions for enhancing classroom instruction. Here are some examples of materials that best appeal to different VAKT learning styles:

- For visual learners: demonstrating processes so students can watch; using photographs and pictures, charts and graphs, and study cards.
For auditory learners: describing processes aloud so students can listen; asking students to speak their answers to questions aloud; incorporating arts that involve listening, such as poetry and music.

For tactile/kinesthetic learners: asking students to write answers, either on the board or in their notebooks; incorporating student sessions at the computer to either write or retrieve information.

Almost all descriptions of best practices include utilizing some form of learning style theory or appeal to multiple intelligences, and application of this knowledge has powerful implications for anyone working with children—including librarians.

**Process over Facts: Metacognitive Learning**

Another set of student-centered approaches are derived from the underlying theory that students must be taught processes, or metacognitive skills, rather than knowledge. For example, in constructivist learning design, students are taught “a naturally occurring and real-world way of thinking about learning and teaching. The teacher acts as a choreographer... students actively construct their own knowledge” (Gagnon and Collay 2006, xiii). Various reflective methods help students evaluate what they read. Roe et al. (2007) have outlined several of them in their text on teaching literacy across content areas. The list includes but is not limited to

- **Know–Want to know–Learned (KWL).** Students articulate what they already know when they start a text and what they want to learn from it; then, finally, they reflect on what knowledge they have acquired.
- **Directed Reading/Thinking Activity (DRTA).** Students think about what they already know about the subject they will examine, predict what the next portion of the text will be about, read the text, and evaluate the text by confirming, rejecting, revising, or extending their predictions.
- **SQ3R.** Students *survey* or scan the text; develop a list of *questions* the text will likely answer; and then use 3 Rs: *read* the text, *recite* the answers to the questions developed, and *review* the material by rereading and verifying answers.
- **ROWAC.** Students *read* headings, *organize* by creating an outline from the headings, *write* down predictions about what they are learning, *actively* read, and *correct* predictions.
At least one method, SQRQCQ (survey, question, read, question, compute, question), focuses on math instruction. Many of these processes qualify as “scaffolding,” a current buzzword in pedagogy that refers to creating structures that help students understand how to approach material with which they struggle.

Interpersonal Relations in Education Theory

A body of research on the most effective ways to interact with students proves useful to the reference interview and other homework help processes. Those most applicable to helping students with homework in the library are addressed in detail in chapter 6. Topics range from questioning—both asking and answering questions—to constructive uses of praise and culturally responsive education. The latter is especially important because librarians have seen an increase in diversity among young patrons and must respond to their needs. Glasgow et al. (2006) identify strategies that are based on research and have proved effective in diverse classrooms, including the importance of developing personal relationships with students. Students of all backgrounds flourish when teachers establish a good rapport with them, but research shows that personal connections are especially important for enhancing classroom interactions with students from diverse communities.

Too Much, Too Little, or Just Right: The Amount of Homework and Where Libraries Fit In

Most of the theories and methods described here apply to classroom pedagogy, though they have applications to out-of-school learning. Quite a bit of the discourse on homework is about its place in the educational process, whether children have too much or too little of it, and what kinds of assignments teachers should distribute to their charges. Should students have more homework? Is homework destroying the family? Who wants homework anyway? How much is too much?

The debate about appropriate levels of homework has raged about as long as schools have been in session, but there are constants. For one, the popularity or unpopularity of homework has consistently reflected trends in education. When progressive methods that foster flexibility and open education have been in vogue, homework has been blamed for everything from poor student health (even mortality) to the devastation of the family unit. Conversely, when the tides shift and the educational guiding principle is academic excellence, the dearth and quality of homework come under fire. In fact, Gill and Schlossman (2004) found that homework levels really have not varied much from
one decade to the next; what has changed is “the proportion of high school students doing 2 hours or more daily.” Additionally, parents have consistently wanted their children to have homework even when no evidence exists to support the position that it helps learning; parents believe “that children who did homework learned more” (11).

From the librarian’s perspective, the issue is not whether students get too much or too little homework but rather how to provide the assistance students need completing it—and they do need help. Not only do students frequently struggle with their homework, many need help with their assignments because often adults are not home to assist them. The library is one of the places they go when help is not available at home. If large numbers of students converge on libraries for assistance with assignments, librarians need to be ready to manage their numbers and their questions. The potential impact librarians can have on patrons is enormous, especially among those least likely to receive homework support at home. As Kralovec and Buell (2001) point out, homework is “the great discriminator” because it remains an integral aspect of educational achievement, but the factors contributing to students’ ability to complete their homework well vary widely, including the amount of support their families can provide, their home environments, whether they work or play sports after school, and what supplemental resources are available to them. If librarians establish a successful menu of homework help services for students, they have the opportunity to level the playing field.

COMMON GROUND: WHERE LIBRARIES AND SCHOOLS MEET

This discussion is primarily theoretical, but these are theories that have applications to youth services as well as pedagogy, and specific suggestions for applying them to homework help in the library are presented in later chapters in the book. Some current pedagogical best practices, such as cooperative learning groups of students, are impractical in the library setting, but many of the techniques employed in the classroom can be applied to homework help in the library. Not only can schools and libraries share methods of helping their charges, but they have other similar concerns and priorities.

Literacy

Information services and education share certain priorities and experience that impact youth services. First and foremost, schools, which are in the business of
teaching children to read, and libraries, the guardians of information and books, have always been concerned with literacy. In recent years, promoting literacy has become a hot topic in the professions associated with both of these fields.

Libraries were at the forefront of literacy training as early as the turn of the century, when they became involved in assisting new immigrants to read English. They also play “a major role in helping children to read. Previous evaluations of libraries, however, have often bypassed the part libraries play in improving children’s literacy skills” (Celano and Neuman 2001, 4). Now libraries have gone even further in responding to current educational trends. Not only do they fulfill their traditional role of supporting literacy, they have developed programs to foster “emergent literacy,” which begins before kids go off to school. Preschool programs in libraries have proliferated, as have summer reading programs that support these ends. Jones (2007, 9) advocates a similar emphasis for young adult services: “What all teen readers have in common is that they are developing a relationship with reading. The essential role of the young adult librarian is to nurture that relationship.” One of the service responses YALSA suggests for its members is to support basic literacy so students can be prepared to function in their daily lives. Jones and Shoemaker (2001, 110) suggest that libraries respond to this need with “materials, tutors, and instructional software, . . . after-school, weekend, and outreach programs promoting literacy.”

The field of education has also seen a broadened interest in bolstering literacy. No Child Left Behind encourages literacy instruction for all grades and provides a significant level of funding for literacy initiatives for early elementary school students. Literacy instruction is now included in most teacher education programs for all grade levels and subject areas. Now every teacher teaches reading, not just the language arts or English teacher.

In the twenty-first century, not only is literacy in general a priority for libraries and schools, but the two institutions share an interest in particular in information literacy. Information literacy is at the very heart of library service, and the proliferation of technological advances and all that implies for accessing information have resulted in increased concern about students’ facility with technology in both library services and education. Teachers, librarians, general information websites, and even the government advise parents to help their children access information from different sources and to evaluate the information they access. Arguments are even being made for the inclusion of information literacy courses in teacher preparation programs at all levels of education, including college, and formal programs for teaching information literacy to students of all ages are proliferating. Similarly, as early as 1993 the AASL began recommending that information literacy be included in school curricula.
Parental Involvement

Education and information services have additional current interests of professional concern in common, such as the role of parents in providing their services. For example, parents are becoming increasingly involved in their children’s education and are encouraged to do so because of the positive impact it has on academic performance. Similarly, parents are becoming more involved in their children’s library experience as they bring them to participate in preschool programs, story hours, and, of course, increased homework help. In response, some librarians accommodating multiple needs within families have set up programs in which children get help with schoolwork while parents get assistance with their needs, such as learning English. Even a decade ago, Felt (1999) wrote that parents “cannot just drop off their kids in the children’s area to browse. . . . Oh no, we must encourage parents to share the excitement of indexes, controlled vocabulary, and LC vs. Dewey.” There was a time when students walked to the local library on their own, parents’ involvement in schoolwork was limited, and assignments were created with this understanding in mind. The intentional involvement of parents and families in the worlds of youth services and education is a relatively new development.

Numbers and Accountability

In recent decades, both libraries and schools have faced the power of statistics and felt the pressure to implement an empirically based measurement process and prove their worth according to that process. In both the information services and education fields, standards, service evaluations, and some degree of accountability have been important since early on in their modern histories. Most of the criteria then, as now, are driven by professionals and researchers striving for high standards. However, an accountability movement pertaining to a multitude of public services has also had powerful affects on schools and libraries. The occasional standardized testing of pupils in the 1950s and ’60s gave way to frequent, and sometimes legally mandated, testing in the 1970s through the present day. States have scrambled to meet the testing requirements of No Child Left Behind, which only recently came under criticism by researchers who question its effectiveness in closing the achievement gaps it aims to eliminate (Glasgow et al. 2006). Meanwhile, a similar trend has affected the library services world. Only a few states have not implemented standards for library service, and increasingly states are requiring libraries to meet certain criteria in order to obtain state aid. Both schools and libraries now have to justify to their constituencies that they meet their communities’ needs.
Homework help is the place where all of the concerns mentioned in this chapter converge. It is where the history and development of youth services intersect with the history and development of K–12 education. When K–12 students descend upon libraries for assistance with school assignments, they increase library usage and beg the question of what kinds of programs should be provided to respond to their needs. Homework help is where we see the fallout of increased pressure on educators to achieve higher test scores. Educators are assigning more and more kinds of homework assignments. Then, as library patrons, students log onto library websites, seek out reference services, and struggle to navigate the stacks and the Internet to complete their schoolwork. It is where some of both the internally and externally driven priorities for each field manifest themselves in practical terms.

Many libraries have responded to this situation by implementing formal homework help programs, a form of library-subsidized tutoring. These programs involve students coming to the library after school to receive one-on-one or small-group assistance with homework assignments on specific days, sometimes as many as four days a week. In fact, some libraries have coordinated with educators to match students with a county- or district-certified teacher to answer homework questions. One example is the Chicago Public Library’s privately funded “Teacher in the Library” program that operates in many branches. In her book on formal homework programs, Mediavilla (2001) advocates increasing the availability of formal in-library homework programs and provides a detailed description of how to do so.

The need for assistance with school assignments, however, is unlikely to be fully met at the library during specified school hours, especially since students’ access to information is no longer dependent on a trip to the library. Now most libraries offer other options to struggling students, and those options are the focus of this book. Students still utilize regular in-library materials and reference services, and they access both reference and homework services through newer technologies such as telephone, e-mail, and chat reference services; library websites that include study advice or links to useful Internet sites; and homework hotlines. Every youth services librarian or general librarian providing services to children faces the decision of how best to provide homework help to young patrons. Aside from homework centers, many choices are available. Effective youth services in your library require a well-thought-out plan of action. Chapter 2 will assist you in that process by discussing the available options and how to evaluate them in the context of your library’s needs.
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